



Vicki Beaver | Permit #14245 | NOAA/AFSC/MMML and the North Slope Borough

Recommendations on Alaskan Arctic Coast Port Access Route Study

With accelerating loss of seasonal sea ice in the Arctic, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) is seeking input on routing measures that would minimize impacts of increased shipping on marine mammals and the Alaska Native communities that depend on marine mammals and the marine ecosystem for food security and sovereignty. The Commission has provided detailed comments and recommended routing measures to this [Alaskan Arctic Coast Port Access Route Study](#).

The Commission analyzed best available scientific information on marine mammal distributions and seasonal movements in the U.S. Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, based on data from aerial surveys and passive acoustic monitoring conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with support from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), as well as tagging and telemetry data. The Commission worked with biologists at NOAA and Duke University to generate maps showing areas and times that walruses, belugas, and several species of large whales occur most frequently in Alaskan Arctic waters.

The Commission identified preferred and alternate routes for vessels traveling between the Bering Strait and the Canadian Arctic as well as coastal and offshore areas that should be avoided. The Commission also highlighted additional measures to minimize disturbance of marine mammals and to help ensure continued access to marine mammals by Alaska Native communities. The Commission's 10 November 2020 letter, with background on marine mammal distributions, movements, feeding and resting areas, as well as the following recommendations and associated maps, can be found on the Commission's [website](#).

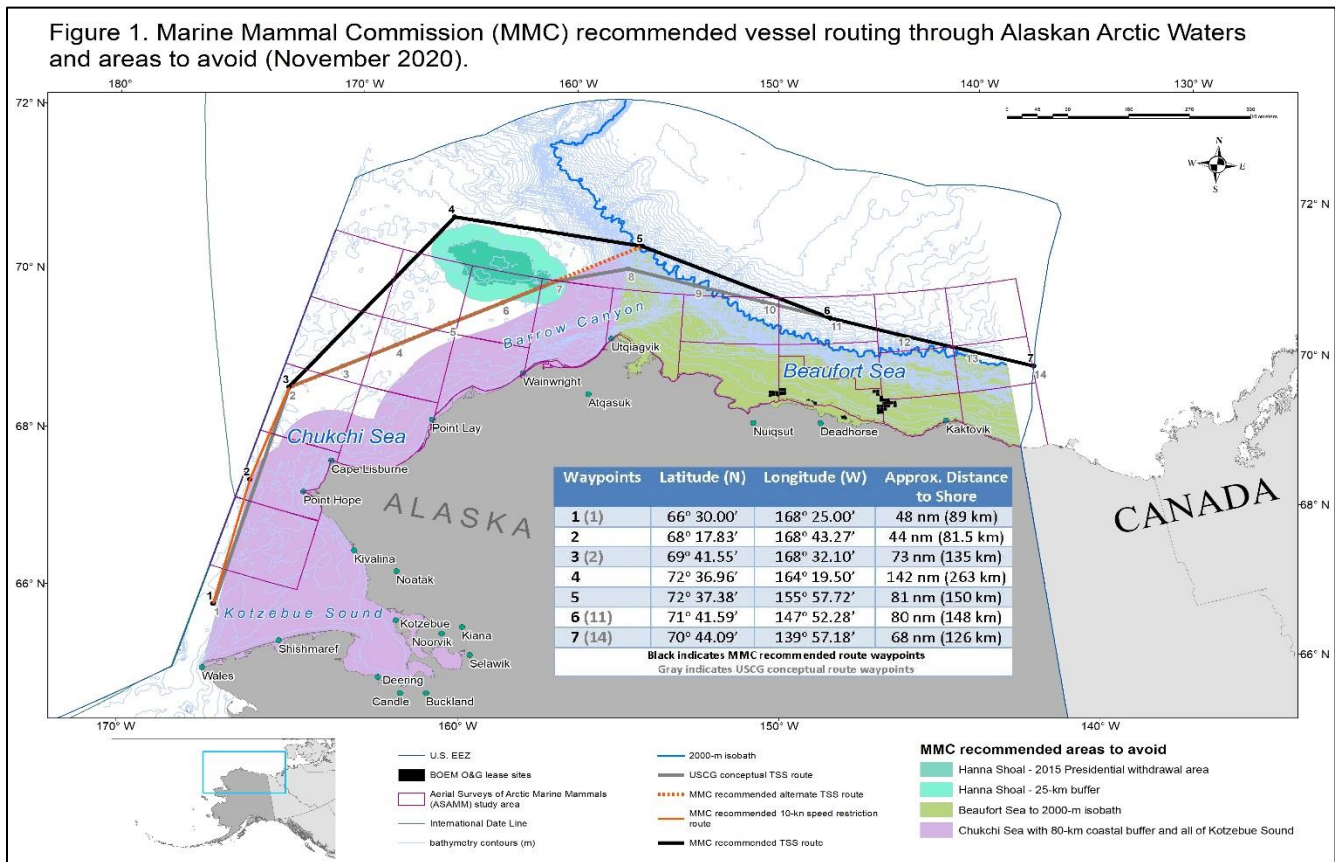
Biologically Sensitive Areas for Marine Mammals

- In the Chukchi Sea, an area that includes waters from Wales to Point Hope, including the entirety of Kotzebue Sound, and all coastal waters from Point Hope to Point Barrow out to 80 km (50 miles) from shore, inclusive of Barrow Canyon (the pink-shaded area in Figure 1).
- The Hanna Shoal core area (the dark teal-shaded area in Figure 1), including a buffer zone extending 25 km around the western and northwestern boundary of the shoal (the lighter teal-shaded area in Figure 1).
- In the Beaufort Sea, an area encompassing the entirety of the U.S. Beaufort Sea from shore northward to the 2,000-m isobath, including the northern end of Barrow Canyon (the green-shaded area in Figure 1).

Recommended changes to USCG's Conceptual Routing (as shown in gray in Figure 1) based on Biologically Sensitive Areas

- Add an additional waypoint (identified as waypoint 2, in black, in Figure 1) further to the west off Point Hope, thereby increasing the distance from Point Hope from 63 km (34 nm) to 81.5 km (44 nm).
- Implement a 10-knot speed restriction in waters between the northern terminus of the Bering Strait PARS route (waypoint 1 in Figure 1) and the waypoint west of Point Lay (waypoint 3, in black).
- Replace the USCG's waypoints 3-7 with a waypoint further to the west of the Hanna Shoal core area (outside the 25-km buffer area discussed above), thereby avoiding Hanna Shoal and the area between Hanna Shoal and the Alaskan coast (including Barrow Canyon). The new waypoint is identified as waypoint 4, in black, in Figure 1¹.
- Replace the USCG's waypoints 8-10 with a waypoint further to the north off Point Barrow, at the 2000-m isobath. The new waypoint is identified as waypoint 5, in black, in Figure 1. The route between new waypoints 6 and 7, in black, would follow the USCG's conceptual route between waypoints 11-14, in gray.

¹ If necessary, to ensure safe navigation, the Commission's recommended alternate routing through the Chukchi Sea would: (1) replace the USCG's waypoints 8-10 (in gray, in Figure 1) with the Commission's recommended waypoint 5 (in black, in Figure 1) to route vessels further north off Point Barrow; and (2) implement a 10-knot speed restriction for the entire length of the alternate route through the Chukchi Sea.



Other Routing Measures and Additional Considerations recommended to the USCG

- Continue to work closely with federal and state resource agencies, Alaska Native communities, and mineral extraction and oil and gas industries to develop routing measures for inshore traffic zones that overlap with biologically sensitive areas.
- Consider other protective measures to avoid whale-vessel collisions, including vessel speed restrictions; deployment of passive acoustic monitoring, trained observers, and thermal imaging technology; and mariner outreach and education programs.
- Continue to work with the Marine Exchange of Alaska and Alaska coastal communities to identify resources needed to support mariner outreach efforts, effective and reliable tracking of vessels, and communications systems.
- Continue to work with NOAA and the Alaska Mapping Executive Committee to identify and address critical gaps in available data to enhance mapping and charting of the Arctic and promote stakeholder engagement.
- Work with NOAA, BOEM, local, state and other federal agencies, and private institutions to gain support for a coordinated, broad-scale, long-term marine mammal surveillance program in the Arctic that includes both aerial and/or vessel surveys and a year-round passive acoustic monitoring program.
- Continue participation and support of the Arctic Council, with an emphasis on implementation of recommendations from the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment working group’s Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment.

Oil Spill Preparedness and Response

- Conduct an updated assessment of oil spill prevention and response capabilities needed to minimize the risks associated with spills of fuel oil or other hazardous materials in each of the northwest Alaska and North Slope communities.
- Collaborate with NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game on environmental studies to better document marine biological resources in the Arctic that would be the focus of a National Resource Damage Assessment in the event of major marine oil spill.

Enhancing the consultation process with Alaska Native Tribal Governments

- Expand the USCG’s consultation process by engaging with each tribal village located within the area covered by the AACPARS, drawing on the best practices outlined in consultation handbooks, ocean planning, and policy guidance documents.
- Work with other federal agencies conducting or planning activities in the Arctic to build tribal capacity to engage in government-to-government consultation on federal actions that affect tribal resources and interests.